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Mapping Transnational Subjecthood: Space, Affects and Relationality in Recent Transnational Italian Fictions

Jennifer Burns

The hybridity and nomadic plurality of transnational subjectivity is often articulated and celebrated, perhaps most fully and influentially in Rosi Braidotti's theorizing of nomadic thought and the nomadic subject.¹ In this article, I wish to engage with some of the suppositions which lie behind perceptions of the fluid multicultural and multilingual composition of the "nomadic subject" and examine closely the lived processes by which a sense of individual subjectivity is composed (and recomposed) within the transnational individual. Ella Shohat explores in a recent biographical essay her positionality as an Iraqi Jew raised in Israel and a US-based academic in cultural studies writing on diasporas and representations of the Middle East. She closes the piece with a reflection on how she approached writing about herself and those who shared her formation: "My words were meant to speak for a generation whose dreams were muted and mutilated by the everyday demands of hyphenated realities. Writing as an act of re-membrance has helped me to construct a kind of portable shrine for those taboo memories, while also framing a reluctant eulogy lest the memories completely fade away."² Shohat pinpoints here the possibly agonistic disjuncture between the ideal and the everyday in the experience of a mobile subject, the significant emotional strain of association with and dissociation from plural kinship settings, and the function of writing one's experience, and she ushers these points under the redolent title of "an emotional cartography." Though rooted in an experience somewhat different from the ones which I focus on here, her comments signal some of the quite intimate and problematic questions about narrating individual subjectivity in a transnational context which I will explore.

The subject formations which concern me are expressed through recent fictional narratives in Italian. These are prose narratives which tell the lives of individuals who move between and beyond the geographic, political, cultural, and linguistic boundaries of single nation states, or who inhabit shared spaces in which cultures and identities intersect. My focus is not on concepts of identity nor identity politics, but rather on everyday practices of awareness, enactment, and expression of self, asking not *who are* the subjects constructed in transnational stories but *what do they do* and *how do they live* an experience of subjectivity which speaks to plural models, values, and locations? As my title suggests, a central concern is the relationship between space and subjectivity: the geographies, topographies, and indeed, topologies of individual experience trace a particular set of physical, experiential, cultural, linguistic, and mnemonic relations which invite an apprehension of individual subjectivity as a map which connects multiple sites, both global and "local," but which remains dynamic, throwing into relief particular locations and relations at any one given moment.

¹ See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York and Chichester, UK: Columbia University Press, 2011).

² Ella Shohat, "Remembering a Baghdad Elsewhere: An Emotional Cartography," *Biography*, 37/3 (2014): 784–790, 790.

Informing my approach to these specific life fictions is Braidotti's privileging of the term "cartography" to express the composite formation of subjectivity, in which multiple locations and temporalities are co-present. Particularly suggestive to my analysis is her description of "figurations" as "ways of expressing different situated subject positions. A figuration renders the nonunitary image of a multilayered subject. [...] A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self—it's no metaphor. It fulfils the purpose of finding suitable situated locations to make the difference between different locations."³ Though this description aptly expresses many of the elements of subject formation which I address in this article, I choose not to adopt Braidotti's term throughout and employ instead the terms which articulate most immediately the experiences of self which emerge from the texts that I analyze. I foreground "subjecthood" in my discussion, alongside the more intuitive and plastic term, "subjectivity," to call attention to the construction of a sense of self as the achievement of a particular status or condition, indicated by the suffix, "hood." This is the implication of many narratives of transnational subjectivity: that there is emotional work to be done to construct a particular self in a challenging context and to gain recognition for it. This is not to say that the subjecthood achieved will be coherent, fixed and permanent: in all examples, the process of establishing transnational subjecthood is open-ended and dialogical. The subject is a work in progress. However, the texts that I will discuss in depth here, as well as a range of comparable narratives in Italian telling the lives of migrants and mixed-ethnicity subjects, indicate that plural subject positions attached to different cultural and national groundings are envisaged by the transnational subject, even more acutely than by any other individual subject, as a task to be accomplished, a process leading to some kind of identifiable product, albeit endlessly deferred.⁴ David Conradson and Deirdre McKay echo this when they comment on "understanding of the self as a relational *achievement*."⁵

Before analyzing closely the novels which are my "case studies" in this discussion, it is important to set out in some detail the conceptual and theoretical framework which informs both my methodology in interpreting my selected texts and the terminology I use, which in many cases is open for discussion across plural disciplines and cultural contexts. Firstly, the term "transnational" itself is quite clearly defined in the context of research in the social sciences,⁶ but is often used in the humanities and cultural studies in a more open way, overlapping and in dialogue with related terms and concepts.⁷ The notion of exceeding or moving beyond national boundaries remains central, and of privileging the shared spaces beyond or between borders where common currency is achieved through experiences of mobility and of mixed affiliations, heritage, nationalities, and cultures. In cultural studies, the contiguous concept of the transcultural serves to blur rather than sharpen definitions, with the result that the transnational may refer to liminal and pluralized conditions predicated on cultural exchange as well as physical movement between or beyond the sovereignties of individual nation-states. For this reason, the term "transcultural" may seem more readily to apply to the forms of circulation

³ Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 14.

⁴ See "Identity" in Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (Oxford, UK: Peter Lang, 2013), 21–64.

⁵ David Conradson and Deirdre McKay, "Translocal Subjectivities: Mobility, Connection, Emotion," *Mobilities*, 2/2 (2007): 167–74, 167 (emphasis mine).

⁶ For a clear summary, see Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London, UK and New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁷ See, for example, Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca, NY and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2010). In relation particularly to Italian culture, see Emma Bond, "Towards a Trans-National Turn in Italian Studies," *Italian Studies*, 69/3 (2014): 415–24.

across borders of cultural products, practices, norms, and values that are the focus of research in cultural studies.

However, in relation to the mobility of people, languages, ideas, and cultural practices with which I am concerned, and perhaps particularly in relation to contemporary Italy, the notion of the “transnational” provides a valuable and insistent reminder that culture rarely (if ever) has the possibility absolutely to transcend politics. The immigration, fiscal, security and citizenship policies of nation-states impinge very immediately on the movement, social and political status, and everyday experience of the individual subjects who may be the subject matter and/or the creators themselves of the cultural production which is at the center of my research. A further pointer offered by the term “transnational” in the context of the disciplinary area of Italian Studies and of my research specialism—“Italian literature”—is that it challenges directly the methodological nationalism which often sticks to research in literary and cultural studies, and turns a spotlight upon the cultural assumptions which I am calling into crisis. It makes plain that the notion that the texts, authors, and practices that I am examining “originate” in or “belong” to Italy cannot serve as a definition but rather a question or even provocation.

To return to my wider conceptual framework here, I turn to the work of anthropologist Aihwa Ong on “flexible citizenship.”⁸ As indicated in my comments above, the transdisciplinary reach of the notion of the transnational is one of the appealing elements of the concept, though to be handled with caution. That the term has been adopted and theorized in a range of disciplinary contexts signals its near essential relevance to studies of contemporary society and also provides a range of means of unpicking and understanding the concept and its effects. Whilst mindful of the risks of such a methodological “pick and mix” technique, and of skimming over important depths of context, I think these are outweighed by the benefit to be gained from posing questions or exposing mechanisms which otherwise tend to fall outside the purview of research in literary studies. In this respect, Ong, analyzing the practices of mobile workers (mostly holders of multiple passports) in East Asia, is looking at conditions of labor and migration very different from those of the migrant and mixed-ethnicity characters in Italy whose subjectivity is explored in the fictions which are my focus. However, this means that she productively takes a critical distance from studies of migration and places her focus interestingly on what mobile workers in contemporary society *do*. In her words, her book examines “the *transnational practices and imaginings* of the nomadic subject and the social conditions that enable his [*sic*] flexibility,” drawing attention to the centrality of the imagination in constructing a sense of self, in everyday life as well as in fictional representations.⁹ I follow this principle, paying attention to what Ong identifies as the “transnational imaginings” of individual subjects constructed as characters or narrators of migration stories.

The transnational is further unpicked by Ong in ways which illuminate the “practices” and “imaginings” of subjects in the recent Italian fictions I will explore. She first comments that, “*Trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something” (*Flexible Citizenship*, 4). I would note her spatial emphasis on movement across “lines,” which suggest not only national borders but other points of division and contact between cultures and languages and also within them: the movements across subnational communities and cultures, or across genders, generations and social classes. Her note that the “trans” suggests “changing the nature of something” is particularly pertinent to the widely noted impact exerted

⁸ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁹ Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 2 (all Ong emphases from source text).

on Italian national culture and historical memory by recent immigration to Italy, but more particularly, Italy's longer histories of transnational movements of people (out of the nation-state to other countries and continents, for economic and political reasons), and of subnational population shifts (rural to urban, south to north).¹⁰ On a more everyday and individual level, though, it also suggests the incremental processes of the construction of subjecthood across spaces and cultures which are the focus of my attention here.

Ong further asserts that, "besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the *transversal*, the *transactional*, the *translational*, and the *transgressive* aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism" (*Flexible Citizenship*, 4). The four adjectives that she foregrounds pinpoint usefully the everyday actions of individuals that are narrated in the fictions which I examine. The "transversal" draws attention to the ways in which horizontal relations across localities and cultures globally may dislodge, in everyday life, the verticality of the top-down social and economic organization of nation-states and international relations. The "transactional" similarly highlights exchange and negotiation, key elements in my discussion below and key habits and techniques in the everyday business of living between and across cultures and languages. The latter come to prominence in Ong's next privileged term, the "translational," which is striking, whether referring strictly to acts of linguistic translation or more broadly to practices of cultural translation, for it is the fluid but sometimes fraught practice of constant exchange between languages in globalized society which, as the very medium and mode of individual and community expression, is crucial to any sense of being and belonging as a citizen.¹¹ Lastly, Ong accentuates the "transgressive," nicely articulating the potential for challenge and change encased in the everyday work and doings of transnational subjects. For my analysis in particular, this term highlights the possibilities of disruption, dissonance, even disgrace, which are often at the root of the most eloquent fictional storylines, those which have the capacity, recalling Ong's earlier description, to "change the nature" of how the reader or readership apprehends social relations and their own cultural commons.

The final point I would note in relation to Ong's description above is that, whilst situating the progressive, expansive, and interactive features of transnational living in quite a tight and specific political and economic context, she avoids the dichotomy between global and local which is often constructed and which tends to identify globalization as a force erasing local specificities and deadening the capacity for local practices and values to assert their efficacy. As Doreen Massey notes, "there is an overwhelming tendency both in academic and political literature and other forms of discourse and in political practice to imagine the local as a product of the global. Understanding place as the product of wider relations has often been read as understanding place as having no agency. [...] Place, in other words, 'local place,' is figured as inevitably the *victim* of globalization."¹² In Ong's formulation, however, the capacity of the transnational subject to imagine transgressively is "incite[d]" and even "enable[d]" by the forces of capitalism. In this sense again, her focus on practices and behaviors at the "micro" level of

¹⁰ See Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Pasquale Verdicchio, *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism Through the Italian Diaspora* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

¹¹ On unseen gaps between languages in the on-site work of NGOs, see Hilary Footitt, "International Aid and Development: Hearing Multilingualism, Learning from Intercultural Encounters in the History of OxfamGB," *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 2017 (online), DOI: 10.1080/14708477.2017.1368207.

¹² Doreen Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B. Human Geography*, 86/1 (2004): 5–18, 10 (emphasis in source text).

specific communities permits the flexibility of the transnational citizen-subject to be identified and valued, even whilst acknowledging the weight of political and economic priorities at the “macro” level, which curb or “regulate” individual and local agency.

The question of the interplay between local and global discourses is particularly pertinent in the context of narratives of individual subjective experience in sites or conditions of transnationality, and with this, the question of the place (or displacement) of the national. Thinking of individual affiliations, emotional attachments, and “imaginings” (to use Ong’s vocabulary), these are likely, for migrants and transnational subjects, to affix more immediately and deeply to local places, communities, cultures, and memories than to the nation. Narratives of migration in Italian display this over and over again: regional geography, local topography, the texture of a vernacular architecture or of local materials, the design of a single home, courtyard, or room; local accent, dialect, familial idiolects; daily routines of working, praying, preparing and consuming food and drink, all populate recollections of the home culture, with what Michel de Certeau has termed “a strange lucidity that often re-joins—in many facets—the foreign perspicacity of the ethnologist.”¹³ National identity, on the other hand, tends to surface mainly as an obstacle or object of contestation: at border crossings, as a bureaucratic or fiscal issue, in racist or other hostile encounters.

In this respect, Conradson and McKay have explored the formation and action of “translocal subjectivities,” drawing upon Arjun Appadurai’s notion of “translocality.”¹⁴ Appadurai notes the capacity of local communities and their practices to be stretched across a range of global sites by means of the attachments of mobile subjects, who revive and maintain reference to specific localities even where significant geographical and cultural distances exist between sending and destination contexts. Looking at the complex attachments to places—of both departure and arrival—of mobile subjects, and at the tendency noted above for attachments to the local to prevail, Conradson and McKay assert that, “At the level of everyday experience, we believe it [...] makes as much sense to think of trans-local as trans-national subjectivities” (169). This tension between the translocal and transnational is, in my view, a productive one, which individual fictional narratives illustrate and explore in suggestive ways.

It is the emotional and affective dimension of mobility—and of constructions of subjecthood through mobility—that is, in my view, under-researched and yet has the capacity to transform understanding of transnational communities and of everyday human interaction in globalized society. This area has become increasingly prominent in the social sciences—particularly social and human geography and sociology—and it is worth pausing briefly on some of these contributions in order to understand what different disciplinary approaches to the analysis of emotion and affect can offer to literary and cultural studies, where the representation and expression of emotion is central to analytical practice.

A robust discussion of what affect might be and how it works in relation to space in particular is offered by Nigel Thrift, who acknowledges the difficulty of defining, and therefore analyzing, affect, but through exploring a number of approaches, develops some principles important to my work in this discussion. Thrift notes that:

in each approach *affect is understood as a form of thinking*, often indirect and

¹³ Michel de Certeau, *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 171.

¹⁴ Conradson and McKay, “Translocal Subjectivities,” 168. They refer to Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

non-reflective, it is true, but thinking all the same. And similarly, all manner of the spaces which they generate must be thought of in the same way, as means of thinking and as thought in action. Affect is a different kind of intelligence about the world, but it is intelligence none-the-less, and previous attempts which have either relegated affect to the irrational or raised it up to the level of the sublime are both equally wrong-headed.¹⁵

The stress on affect as thinking, as a process of making sense of space, time, action and of the individual's position in relation to these, is an important principle in understanding how subjecthood is formed through everyday experience especially in transnational contexts, where the interpretation of the world around may be radically challenged by unfamiliar practices and experiences. This relates to two further important points underscored in Thrift's discussion. One is that, following Spinoza, affects are produced through encounters and relations, and that individual responses to other humans may surprise, producing unexpected affects which, to borrow Ong's terms again, may "change the nature of things." Sara Ahmed offers a further elaboration on how emotions work in this respect: "The term encounter suggests a meeting, but a meeting which involves surprise and conflict. We can ask: how does identity itself become instituted through encounters with others that surprise, that shift the boundaries of the familiar, of what we assume that we know?"¹⁶

The second point I wish to highlight from Thrift's discussion is that, following Deleuze, affect is always emergent, moving beyond the confines of the body in which it is produced, and in this sense is marked by an expansive opening out towards others and through spaces. Again, Ahmed offers an interesting counterpoint in her work, which scrutinizes the workings of emotion in the context of difference, associated particularly with gender and sexuality and with race and ethnicity. Here, the emergence of affect occurs with bodily encounter, and is as likely to produce forms of closure as of openness: "In my model of sociality of emotions, I suggest that emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others."¹⁷

As these points suggest, an underlying and important premise of this discussion of affect is that it is always embodied, denying any Cartesian distinction between cognition and bodily experience and drawing attention to the ways in which the body and the responses it produces function as an instrument or practice of intelligence; emotions are a form of "corporeal thinking."¹⁸ This, for my analysis of textual accounts of transnational experience, is a crucial point, since so often the outcome of the transnational encounters narrated is predicated on bodily recognition, or misrecognition; on physical presence in space, which raises questions about being and belonging and challenges the individual subject to know her or his body differently.

Language, as embodied practice, is a complex mechanism of emotional expression, perhaps particularly for the plurilingual subject. Emotions may well exceed language and confound it, but

¹⁵ Nigel Thrift, "Intensities of Feeling: towards a Spatial Politics of Affect," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B. Human Geography*, 86/1 (2004): 57–78, 60 (emphasis in source text).

¹⁶ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London, UK and New York: Routledge, 2000), 6–7.

¹⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 10.

¹⁸ Thrift, "Intensities of Feeling," 67.

by focusing forensically on the conditions in which language breaks down in relation to emotions, and then is rebuilt in order to recount and share the experience of extreme emotion—whether as an anecdote, a witness statement, testimony, history, family wisdom, performance, etc.—one can gain insight into the workings of affects. Ahmed privileges textuality in this respect and highlights that language, rather than obscuring the mechanics of emotions, uncovers them:

I am not discussing emotion as being “in” texts, but as effects of the very naming of emotions, which often works through attributions of causality. The different words for emotion do different things precisely because they involve specific orientations towards the objects that are identified as their cause. As such, my archive is full of words. But the words are not simply cut off from bodies, or other signs of life. I suggest that the work of emotion involves the “sticking” of signs to bodies: for example, when others become “hateful,” then actions of “hate” are directed against them.¹⁹

Transnational and translingual narratives expose particularly telling regimes of the expressible and inexpressible where they suppress certain terms or languages and reify others, dismantle or disrespect the rules of standard languages, tuck unfamiliar languages behind the familiar syntax and vocabulary printed on the page, translate ostentatiously or surreptitiously, or switch fluidly between languages. Such performances can be spectacular and seductive, however, creating an illusion not necessarily of the producer’s mastery of language(s) but of the consumer’s: it is easy to assume that affects expressed in a language that we recognize are the same as affects we as speakers of that language have felt. Conradson and McKay, citing work by Anna Wierzbicka, draw attention to the dangers of assuming that emotions are universal and, particularly, that their expression is universally codified and comprehensible; in other words, that emotions “translate” with transparency.²⁰ They offer the provocation that “Too many discussions of migrants in populist and some academic literature have universalized English-language or western categories of emotion in order to make arguments about experiences of exploitation, alienation and marginalisation. But what if a person’s cultural frame of reference is entirely different?” (*Translocal Subjectivities*, 172).

This question of cultural frames of reference subtends my analysis of two recent novels in Italian here in terms of the stories they tell of the construction of transnational subjecthood. The first is *Nuvole sull’equatore*, published in 2010 by Somali diasporic writer Shirin Ramzanali Fazel.²¹ Here, the story of two women is told: that of Amina, a Somali woman, and her daughter, Giulia, whose father is an Italian who travelled as part of the Italian colonial enterprise to Eritrea, and then after World War II, moved to Somalia under the A.F.I.S., and later to Kenya.²² The stories are narrated in the third person, with a close focus on the ways in which Giulia’s subjectivity, as a mixed-race child, is assembled through childhood and adolescence to young adulthood. Interesting, especially in relation to Ong’s foregrounding of the practices of

¹⁹ Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 13.

²⁰ Anna Wierzbicka, “Emotion and Culture: Arguing with Martha Nussbaum,” *Ethos*, 31/4 (2004): 577–600.

²¹ Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, *Nuvole sull’equatore. Gli Italiani dimenticati. Una storia* (Cuneo: Nerosubianco, 2010).

²² A.F.I.S. was the “Amministrazione fiduciaria italiana della Somalia,” under the terms of which the area of Somalia, which was formerly an Italian colony, was placed by the UN under Italian administration from 1949 to 1960, when the country gained independence. See Antonio Maria Morone, *L’ultima colonia: come l’Italia è ritornata in Somalia, 1950–1960* (Rome: Laterza, 2011).

transnational subjecthood, is that the author largely eschews the immediate exploration of Giulia's interiority which a first-person narrative would favor and instead focuses precisely on the practices Giulia engages in to navigate and elaborate a subjectivity between the cultural frames of reference predicated by her mixed-race status.

Schooling, family, friendships, the social groups within which her family moves, travel, leisure, and entertainment, open up a series of social and affective practices through which Giulia may build a sense of her specificity as a subject. Though she has never been to Italy and her father is a background presence in her life, these practices bespeak a presumed orientation towards an identity mapped onto a notion of Italian-ness, or are at least regulated by that notion. Her name signals this orientation. The subtitles of the novel—*Gli italiani dimenticati. Una storia*—invite the reader to read this as, indeed, the story of a forgotten *Italian*. Recalling my comments on subjecthood, the recovery of her status as an Italian subject and citizen is implicitly posited as Giulia's goal.

It is the relationality of Giulia's process towards adult subjecthood which creates in Ramzanali Fazel's novel an expansive geographical map. The geospatial coordinates of Giulia's dual citizenship (Somali Italian), and her movement between them, are clearly positioned in the novel, but are also refined by a more complex set of movements. She moves with her parents from Mogadishu to Nairobi as a child, when Somalia gains independence. They follow, to use Ong's term, the "opportunistic" responses to political and commercial shifts of her Italian father, Guido, himself an earlier example of a "flexible citizen."²³ Her mother returns to Somalia and Giulia later follows her, leaving Guido behind: at this point, her primary reference point of Italian-ness becomes absent from her daily life. The substitute is her education at a remote boarding school in Somalia, where she is schooled in the curriculum and the value system of a deterritorialized and imperial regime of Italian-ness. As a teenager, she then moves back to school and home in Mogadishu, living with her mother, now married to a Somali man, Yusuf. In her late teens, she develops a tentative relationship with a young Somali man, Yassin, who subsequently moves to the USSR to train as a military pilot, their relationship becoming an epistolary exchange that ends with his arranged marriage to a Somali cousin. Finally, in her late teens or early twenties, Giulia moves to Rome.

This itinerant, highly relational production of young adult subjecthood allows Giulia to draw upon multiple cultural and linguistic models of identity, but the notional and narrative endpoint remains her self-realization as an Italian citizen. What is particularly interesting is that this personal and political destination—the recovery of an "italiana dimenticata"—is undermined by her experience of being Roman and Italian (to be discussed below), but also by the privileging in the narrative of what we might term south-to-south mobility. Giulia's is not a single, determined trajectory from subaltern subject in the colony to fully realized "Italian" citizen-subject at the imperial center, but rather a movement between multiple coordinates which connect cities, localities, and nations of Africa between themselves as well as, implicitly but secondarily, with the USSR, Europe, and particularly Italy. This transnational experience and its construction of her subjecthood articulate a mobility of reference points and of practices of selfhood that challenge more rigid models of hybrid identity and privilege instead a spatial epistemology of the self.

The above offers a sketch of the "transnational practices" of Giulia's emergent citizenship, which in Ong's formulation are coupled with the transnational "imaginings" of the mobile

²³ Ong comments that the cultural logics of capitalism "induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions." Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 6.

subject. Giulia's reflections upon and imaginative constructions of her absent father as an Italian signal her desire for the distant nation, Italy, which remains out of her geographical reach throughout childhood and teenage years. This is a complex desire, mitigated by the sense of estrangement and exclusion generated by his absences from her life and by the disrupted sense of belonging suggested by his very Italian-ness, his own "belonging" to a culture she has been taught to respect and desire but that she knows only by various forms of proxy. This imagined Italy, impossible in its very distance and exclusivity, and her own imagined Italian-ness, are constituted also by the Italian films that Giulia watches at the cinema, which assemble for her an idea of citizenship in Italy and particularly in Rome. However, Giulia seems aware of its imagined-ness, aware too of the chronological disjuncture between the films of the 1950s that she watches and the lived experience of contemporary Rome which she will encounter on arrival there (in the 1970s). Her mixed-race status, her multicultural formation, and her expansive network of relations instate a fundamental critical distance from the notion of herself as an Italian citizen.

Giulia's story illustrates well the notion of the transnational as, on the one hand, a condition of flexibility and of access to shared experiences, opportunities, languages, cultures, spaces, affects; and on the other hand, a notion which hinges upon its obverse, in terms of the exclusions, divisions, and hierarchies that might be reinstated by the persistent political, economic, and cultural forces of the nation-state in late modernity. Or, to put it in Ong's terms, Giulia's story tells us of the opportunities created by "transnational practices and imaginings," and of the power of the "disciplining structures—of family, community, work, travel, and nation" (Flexible Citizenship, 14) against which Giulia's sense of self is repeatedly measured and judged, both within her own interiority and by external forces. The *collegio* she attends in Somalia is one such disciplining structure, in which the social and moral values of a nation, concentrated in its deterritorialized form as part of a colonial infrastructure of knowledge management, are deployed to shape the sense of citizenship and identity of transnational subjects-in-information. The "transgressive" aspects of transnational selfhood that Ong highlights are here understood absolutely in terms of threat: these mixed-race children are identified as the "figlie del peccato" and the objective of the *collegio* regime is to cleanse them of the outrage they represent to a sharply-constructed notion of Italian-ness.²⁴

The orientation towards a subject identification as a transnational Italian citizen that Giulia has internalized is in this way turned back by a punitive and exclusive model of Italian-ness. At this point in her formation, the Italian nation presents itself to her as a model of brutal correction and as the source of trauma: the *collegio* regime insists on a radical and forced separation from her mother and the emotional support she finds in female friendship is ruptured by the death of her best friend from tetanus. To follow the logic of Thrift's argument about the operations of affect, the affects prompted by the encounter with the *collegio* structure, standing as proxy for the Italian nation-state, produce for her "a different kind of intelligence about the world," an education which counters directly the one envisaged by the school in establishing an emotionally critical estrangement from its "Italian" methods and values.²⁵

A powerful desire to know and to construct herself as a Somali citizen-subject also motivates Giulia. Her encounter with reference points of Somali culture, which, despite her geographical presence in the country, are an object of curiosity and of difficult intelligibility, articulates a process which remains throughout the novel at play with her movement towards

²⁴ Ramzanali Fazel, *Nuvole sull'equatore*, 148.

²⁵ Thrift, "Intensities of Feeling," 60.

becoming a “forgotten” Italian. In terms of wider questions of agency—and particularly postcolonial cultural dynamics—this process allows Ramzanali Fazel, as author, to place Italy and Somalia in direct dialogue, and to explore the encounter between the two nations and cultures as a mutually constitutive one which produces meaning long beyond the moment of “independence.”

Somalia is thus as exoticized in the novel and in Giulia’s transnational “imaginings” as is Italy. An example is the period she spends, as a teenager in rural Somalia, living with Dada, the woman who took care of her at home through infancy and childhood and with whom she will later make her first Hajj. As even this brief description indicates, this is an experience framed for Giulia—perhaps stereotypically—as a return to an origin, and as a revisioning of herself as an emergent adult subject against the norms of a deeply traditional understanding of what it is to be Somali. Dada functions as the constant and stable reference point of historical Somali culture throughout the novel, and as one of a number of models of female identity, here played out in terms of matriarchal culture. Taken out of place (away from Mogadishu to an unspecified remote area) and out of time (age-old practices and facilities take the place of the modern homes, services, communication and social structures of Mogadishu), this experience establishes for Giulia an “Other” against which to measure herself and incites in her a curiosity, even desire, which responds to the exoticism for her of this intranational and yet intercultural encounter. In a sense, Giulia inhabits the role of an ethnographer here (with all the colonial connotations this bears), observing the everyday life, the behaviors, and the forms of sociality of a community she does not know.

Language, interestingly, is at the center of this deactivation of Giulia’s urban Somali/Italian competencies, in two striking ways. One is that she takes the opportunity during this visit to learn Arabic and to go to Quranic school, articulating a desire to embody a non-Italian linguistic, cultural, and spiritual subjecthood. At the same time, Arabic is a written, formal language of Somalia but not the spoken language of Dada’s community, which is instead a rural and unwritten form of Somali of which Giulia has only scant understanding. In parallel ways, Giulia thus divests herself of the knowledge and relational capacity that she owns, as an educated Somali Italian, and opens herself up to being radically disarmed by ignorance: she does not know how to cook in this environment, how best to fetch water, how to make friends, how to speak, or indeed, how to follow local practice by communicating through looks, gesture, and the repetition of culturally-encoded acts. If, returning to Conradson’s and McKay’s statement, we see self-understanding as “a relational achievement,” then it is clear that in this episode, Giulia exposes herself to a very different form of relationality, in which the relational practices with which she is familiar need to be reconstituted. It is a relationality embedded in localized space.

This is also an embodied relationality. As indicated by the different forms of everyday practice and communication outlined above, the understanding of self and of community that Giulia builds here is rooted in the physical. She learns, crucially, by the relation of the bodies of others to her own, rather than by direct embodied experience. In this sense, a step forward in her understanding of sexuality and reproductive biology occurs during this trip, via proximity. Giulia encounters the girls of her own age and a little older who live in the small community, and incrementally develops an identification with them cemented by gender and age but also compromised by linguistic difference and their different practices: they are not like the girls she knew at the *collegio* or in Mogadishu, they do not do what they do. Giulia “gets to know” them largely through physical observation, accompanying them when they go to fetch water, seeing how they move in space, how they relate amongst themselves, and catching bits of verbal

conversation. Through affects akin to love, pride, shame, fear, she thus gains intelligence about female sociality and early womanhood in this (and wider) community.

A key moment is when one girl in the group is found dead as a result of a rumored pregnancy. Only rumors and snippets of verbalized information serve to explain her death, whether through miscarriage or some external intervention, and as such both Giulia and the reader of her story are placed in the position of not “knowing,” but rather assembling intelligence by means of affective response to the incident. This shared “corporeal thinking” produces an understanding which is not command of the facts of the incident nor of reproductive biology, but rather a consciousness, fuelled by the shock, fear, pain of the death, of the construction and control of female sexuality in this context. Through affective and embodied engagement with other subjects in this episode, Giulia thus adjusts or reconstructs her understanding of her own subjecthood as a late adolescent female.

Placing this episode within my framework of the construction of transnational subjecthood reveals some important further insights. No national borders are crossed in this episode, and yet within the formal political borders of a nation—Somalia—one individual encounters starkly different practices, languages, forms of social organization, and value systems. This throws into relief the co-dependency between subject and space, and also speaks volumes about the contested political history of Somalia. It is tempting to identify transculturality as the more apt term to describe Giulia’s movement here between spaces and the models of subjecthood which they offer, and yet the difference that we see between “cultures” within a single nation-state is arguably not the product of these spaces and communities but rather of the geopolitical maneuverings of nation states and markets which have strategically amplified internal borders and imbalances. It is the politics of the national which make Mogadishu to some degree “Italian,” for example, and other parts of Somalia emphatically not. In this sense, the map of Giulia’s transnational subjecthood needs to be traced in detail across localities within Somalia as well as outside its (shifting) borders.

This point is underscored at the end of Giulia’s story when, on arrival in Rome and in anticipation of the realization of her imagining of and education in Italian-ness, the border controls of a nation-state remind her forcefully that her particular mode of being Italian has been willfully “forgotten.” She enters Italian territory after robust scrutiny of her right to citizenship, and we are told that she feels out of place: “Lei, italiana di pelle scura, non si sente per niente a casa sua.”²⁶ Her subject identity is acutely racialized as she enters Italian territory, and though her mixed-race status has been much present before this in her imaginings of her subjecthood (through her *collegio* experience, for example), here it attaches emphatically to the visible surface of her skin, now recognized as “different.” In the relationality of the translocal, instead, Giulia finds a sense of home and of “achieved” subjecthood: “Molte volte bastava andare alla stazione Termini, e anche se non ci si conosceva risultava facile individuare i propri compaesani, dalla fisionomia e dalla parlata somala. Ti potevi avvicinare e iniziare a raccogliere notizie sulla Somalia, c’era continuamente qualcuno che era appena arrivato” (201). The force and vitality of connection between a specific locality in central Rome and Somalia here produces a sense of home and belonging for Giulia, even as—or because—it is located in a space of transit. Arrival in Rome and realization of her Italian-ness in fact prompts Giulia to look back towards the south, and to cement a sense of subjecthood through constantly reproducing and refreshing the connections of knowledge and affect which tie Italy to Somalia.

Giulia’s story points out that transnational border-crossings are not a necessary precondition

²⁶ Ramzanali Fazel, *Nuvole sull’equatore*, 194.

of transnational experience: the observing subject who moves within communities in a particular territory and the multiple models of subjecthood as well as sociality that they posit may be comparably mobile. Again, this draws attention to space—relational space—as determinant in transnational or transcultural experience. Ash Amin speaks compellingly of “a *heterotopic sense of place* that is no longer reducible to regional moorings or to a territorially confined public sphere, but is made up of influences that fold together the culturally plural and the geographically proximate and distant. Increasingly, cultural attachment to a given city or region is defined through plural spaces of attachment.”²⁷

Such a heterotopic sense of place is expressed by the way in which Giulia inhabits Mogadishu within Rome, and also by the second novel that I wish to discuss here, *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* by Gabriella Kuruvilla.²⁸ As the title suggests, the locality not only of Milan, but of specific areas of Milan, close to the center and increasingly identified since the 1990s for their multiethnic mix, are the substance of the novel. The focus, then, is less the national than the local, and the way that the local “folds together,” as Amin puts it, plural nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, languages, and behaviors.

The territory of Milan in fact provides the structure of the novel, which is divided into four sections identified with four proximate zones of Milan (via Padova, viale Monza, Sarpi and Corvetto). These zones are all identified in the present by their ethnic diversity and also, historically, by experiences of social encounter and conflict: they articulate the live and the changeable. Similarly, each section of the novel is narrated in the first person by a different subject: two Milanese women and two men, an Egyptian and a Neapolitan migrant to Milan. Themes and narrative-poetic techniques create connections between the four sections, as do literal intersections of streets, accidental connections between protagonists or characters, objects which pass between individuals and places, and shared topographical reference points. In other words, the structure and style of the work bespeak a “heterotopic sense of place”; the book presents a constructed locality which traces the convergences and divergences of multiple stories, histories, and modes of being.²⁹

My focus in this discussion will be the first section, “via Padova,” narrated by a subject identified as Anita Patel, born and raised in Milan of mixed Italian and Indian parentage.³⁰ Her account of herself is presented almost as a stream of consciousness, oriented and held together by spatial experience of her locality. Like Giulia in Ramzanali Fazel’s novel, Anita’s experience is recounted in a generally un-reflective, non-interiorizing way, registering events, encounters and experiences and recording some reactions, but not entering into monological exploration of her own subjectivity. In this respect, both she and Giulia appear to be unpromising objects of an analysis of the construction of subjecthood, but it is precisely because of the interface that they animate, as characters, between the affects produced in everyday life in transnational space and a sense of subjecthood-in-process, that they are telling case studies for this discussion.

²⁷ Ash Amin, “Regions Unbound: Towards a New Politics of Place,” *Geografiska Annaler. Series B. Human Geography*, 86/1 (2004): 33–44, 37 (emphasis in source text).

²⁸ Gabriella Kuruvilla, *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* (Rome, Bari: Laterza, 2012).

²⁹ It is worth noting that Kuruvilla’s other works include a series of six multi-authored volumes (so far) dedicated to cities and one region (Calabria), for which she is editor, contributor, and cover designer. The volumes collect short stories related to Milan, Rome, Munich, Bologna, Genoa, and Calabria. All published by Morellini in Milan, they are *Milano d'autore* (2014), *Roma d'autore* (2015), *Monaco d'autore* (2016), *Bologna d'autore* (2016), *Genova d'autore* (2017), and *Calabria d'autore* (2018).

³⁰ There is an autobiographical referent here, in that Kuruvilla is similarly Milanese, with an Italian mother and Indian father.

Where *Nuvole sull'equatore* builds a chronological account of Giulia's coming to adulthood, and so offers a kind of *Bildungsroman* interestingly displaced from Europe, from national identities, and from masculinity, the immersive narrative of Anita's consciousness in Kuruvilla's novel builds a picture of her present, past, and possible futures piecemeal. Local topography lends coherence and unity: for example, the section of the novel that Anita tells opens and closes with her address, "Via Clitumno 11," interestingly followed by the instruction, "citofonare Paola Rossi."³¹ This both attaches her self and her story to a defined domestic space, and also displaces it, allowing Anita Patel (whose name is supplied afterwards) to disappear behind an Italian pseudonym. The narrator also notes straight away that the "citofono" does not work: in other words, the fully Italian fiscal identity is a precarious construct.³²

The narrating subject nevertheless claims throughout her narrative a deep and substantial ownership of local space, referring repeatedly to "il mio palazzo," "il mio bar," "la mia panchina." Her account of herself is an account of her territorial surroundings and of her movement and encounters in it: she is familiar with the physical fabric of the streets and buildings, with the everyday practices of the multicultural community that inhabits them, with the businesses and services offered and their specific characteristics, with individual owners or workers in shops and bars, with the flow and blockages of human and vehicular traffic, with the grass-roots and civic politics of multiculturalism. She also displays a familiarity with the history of the area, offering summary economic and material histories of different streets and buildings. In this sense, she posits an identity as an "indigenous" Italian in this multicultural zone, having lived in or near it for decades, and highlighting through her accounts of when other communities established themselves there her own permanence. This sense of static ownership, of just "being" and not "becoming," is constantly disrupted, though, by the recognition she expresses for others who are made to feel outsiders, which in turn bespeaks her own mixed ethnicity. Like the name on her doorbell, her indigeneity is a trick, drawing attention to a critical question about who lives in contemporary Milan and how they are identified.

Relationality through space is expressed very immediately by the narrating subject here as the everyday encounters with those who inhabit the same territory. This is largely a generous and accommodating relationality, which clearly produces and reproduces affects of fellow-feeling and security in Anita: "Via Padova mi accoglie, sempre. E io mi sento accolta. C'è da dire che a volte il suo abbraccio è un po' troppo intenso. Via Padova non è che accoglie me perché io sono io, e che via Padova ha sempre accolto tutti: lei si dà a chi la vuole."³³ This is her ad hoc, non-reflective intelligence of her locality: she knows it by the feelings it produces and by recognizing similar, shared feelings in others. Recalling my discussion above of both Thrift's and Ahmed's comments on the interplay of emotions and encounter, Anita describes the effects and affects produced by the constant, close proximity of human surfaces: "qui i fatti degli altri ti si appiccicano addosso, attraverso la vista, il tatto, l'olfatto, il gusto e l'udito. I cinque sensi sono sempre sovraesposti, ai fatti degli altri. Ma io gli altri non li giudico. [...] Ma vedo, tocco, annuso, assaggio e ascolto. Impossibile non farlo, in questo palazzo, dove tutto si mescola" (10).

Interior exploration of subjectivity is here replaced by the immediate feelings produced by contact with multiple others in the complex flow of the human sensorium. Hints of anxiety, disgust, estrangement mix with empathy, joy, curiosity, to produce an understanding of self in

³¹ Kuruvilla, *Milano*, 6, 49.

³² On this topic and this novel, see also Graziella Parati, *Migrant Writers and Urban Space in Italy: Proximities and Affect in Literature and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 183–230.

³³ Kuruvilla, *Milano*, 7.

relation to community assembled through the body, or the contact between bodies. Again recalling Thrift's and Ahmed's comments on the impact of "encounters with others that surprise, that shift the boundaries of the familiar,"³⁴ Anita articulates her own sense of being a stranger—or not—in Milan as a product of her changing experience of how the community and her surroundings feel: "E mi accorgo che le sfumature del grigio, il rumore delle auto e l'odore di smog a cui sono abituata qui si confondono con le tinte del giallo, le musiche arabe e gli aromi delle spezie che invece continuano a sorprendermi. E non è facile sorprendersi, a Milano. E continuo a sentirmi spaesata, anche. Come se fossi un viaggiatore in terra straniera, che vede, tocca, annusa, assaggia, ascolta e vive tutto per la prima volta."³⁵

The repetition in the two quotations above of the five verbs articulating the five senses underscores the ethnographic position Anita deploys in relation to her own community, at once participant and observer, citizen and stranger. It also illustrates a stylistic technique that Kuruvilla uses systematically throughout the novel, which is that of creating a rhythmic narrative that at once echoes the pulse of everyday life in a complex and crowded urban environment and also represents an epistemology that the author suggests is the primary way of knowing and living at once—knowing through experiencing—a multicultural and pluralized social reality. The apparently fragmented locality, made up of diverse physical appearances, sounds and languages, smells and textures, behaviors and practices, gestures and signs, is endowed with meaning by means of this very pulse; by repetitions or echoes that bring an instant of coherence and stability to the inhabiting and observing subject who otherwise may be swept along the continuum of deferral in what Amin identifies as "the local as fractal culture."³⁶

The litany of the five senses repeated in Anita's narrative also underscores the body as the site of social interaction and of understanding of self in society, and draws attention to embodied response as a source of intelligence. Language as a mediator in embodied encounter is front and center in each of the four narrators' accounts of themselves and their environment and in their construction and communication of understanding. Each narrator engages with the multiple languages that surface in the locality s/he inhabits, but each also "owns" and uses two languages in her/his narrative, deploying a second language selectively to tell and to structure her/his story. Samir, the Egyptian migrant in "viale Monza," uses Arabic; Stefania, the Milanese artist in "Sarpi," uses Milanese dialect; Tony, the Neapolitan *rasta* in "Corvetto," uses patois. Anita's is the only second language which would be instantly comprehensible to a reader of only standard Italian. It is the language of her mother, an idiomatic Italian which is somewhat antiquated or specialized, and often privileges sound over sense in the way typical of idiomatic speech, but offers a relatively transparent multilingual commentary to the narrative voiced directly by Anita.

The effect of all of these second languages is, again, to install a rhythmic quality in the narrative, since Kuruvilla's technique for not alienating a reader who may struggle with Arabic or patois, for instance, is to precede or follow a phrase in the second language with a paraphrase or translation of it in the standard but highly colloquial Italian that prevails as the language of the novel. This mirroring of utterances, used methodically and fluidly throughout, creates an underlying tempo in each narrative that brings a particular kind of coherence and community to what from other perspectives might be experienced as the estranging clash of languages. This familiarizing of the foreign is lent particular ethical power by the fact that Kuruvilla uses "foreign" languages that have long been indigenous to Italy—Milanese and Neapolitan dialects,

³⁴ See note 19.

³⁵ Kuruvilla, *Milano*, 17–18.

³⁶ Amin, "Regions Unbound," 40.

folkloric idiom—to underscore the point that Italy is a multilingual nation, before and beyond the influx of languages brought by recent immigration. In this respect, Kuruvilla’s novel posits a distinctive challenge to the “monolingual paradigm”—the presumed identity between a single “mother tongue,” ethnicity, nation, and culture—that Yasemin Yildiz has challenged. Kuruvilla’s multiple narrating voices reveal that, as Yildiz asserts:

What is called the “mother tongue” combines within it a number of ways of relating to and through language, be it familial inheritance, social embeddedness, emotional attachment, personal identification, or linguistic competence. Contrary to the monolingual paradigm, it is possible for all these different dimensions to be distributed across *multiple* languages, a possibility that becomes visible only in multilingual formations or when the monolingual paradigm is held in abeyance. [...] This means that we need to reimagine subjects as open to crisscrossing linguistic identifications, if not woven from the fabric of numerous linguistic sources.³⁷

A more intimate function of the “second language,” the actual “mother tongue,” in Anita’s self-narration is that it brings into the present her personal history, lending emotional depth to what is at first glance an immediate, literally superficial narrative of everyday experience. In the context of constructing subjecthood, the recollected phrases that construct Anita’s narrative through a kind of maternal ventriloquism offer a different demonstration of knowledge through affect. Her parents having died in a car accident during Anita’s late teenage years, this verbal presence of her mother in her everyday consciousness and experience both articulates a loss and restores the mother as source of care and intelligence (and frustration). Though Anita’s dialogue with her mother is often used ironically and abrasively to mock maternal wisdom, it maintains the constant presence of the lost parent and memorializes her. For example, describing the city council’s initiative one Christmas to decorate the streets of the multicultural locality with multilingual greetings, and noting the absence of her own heritage language, Hindi, Anita comments: “Vorrei lamentarmi, ma non mi sembra il caso: ‘Meglio poco che niente,’ diceva mia madre. ‘Da cosa nasce cosa,’ concludeva mia madre. Quando concludeva: perché mia madre in realtà poteva parlare per ore, intervallando continuamente i suoi discorsi con detti e proverbi in italiano, ma anche in francese, spagnolo, inglese, cinese e arabo, se voleva.”³⁸ The personal trauma of being suddenly orphaned before adulthood is thus told as part of a construction of Anita’s life story, but told through the experience of the everyday and particularly of translingual knowledge. Shared phrases communicate shared affects and shared wisdom. Maternity similarly affords Anita a vision towards the future, in the form of her infant son, Fabio, whose presence is a constant but unassuming one in the narrative: he accompanies her at home and in the streets, attached to her stomach in a sling and so participating by extension of the maternal body in her experience of the heterotopic space of the local.

Interestingly, both of these major life events—bereavement and maternity—are disclosed in the narrative with direct reference to local space. The real events of February 13, 2010, when what was reported as a riot occurred in via Padova following a fatal argument between a Dominican and an Egyptian man, are framed as the immediate context of Anita’s labor

³⁷ Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 205 (emphasis in source text).

³⁸ Kuruvilla, *Milano*, 23–24.

beginning two weeks early.³⁹ Tellingly, the reference to vehicles being damaged as police clash with the community following the murder prompts a recollection of the death of her parents, and specifically of the distorted remains of their car. This insistent collocation of deeply personal and emotional events within the volatile urban fabric has as its index the urban address which opens and closes her story. The narrative of the everyday discloses at a certain point that, on inheriting her family home at her parents' death, Anita chose to rent out that property to provide herself with an income and to move to her small rented flat in the via Padova zone. Urban locations are used to articulate a fundamental personal rupture: "Anita Patel abita ancora in piazza Ferravilla, Paola Rossi vive da oltre vent'anni in via Clitumno 11."⁴⁰

In conclusion, I have no wish to posit a formula or equation by which space, encounters, relations, and affects produce a/the transnational subject, because my analysis demonstrates that the possible combinations of these elements are multiple and the outcome indefinite. As stressed above, subjecthood may suggest attainment of a condition but, rather than a finite product, it is a process. I will instead highlight, in closure, some parallels and suggestive differences between the texts and the ways in which they narrate the becoming of a transnational subject, in order to identify principles or questions that might productively be thought of in relation to wider reflection on human subjectivity and human emotions in the transnational and transcultural context.

Both of the novels that I have discussed draw attention to the ways in which individual agency (and conditions that reduce it), physical and imagined space, and the topologies of relations between self and others within complex multicultural communities steer the process of formation of the transnational subject. Each incrementally creates, to borrow Shohat's term, an emotional cartography that imprints space across self and vice versa. Are these features the property of the "transnational subject" only, and if so, what defines the transnational subject and distinguishes her or him from the "national" subject, or the "non-migrant" subject, or the "monolingual" or "monocultural" subject? Is there anything specific or different about the novels I have discussed here, in relation to novels by other contemporary Italian writers? Is there anything specific or different about the construction of a transnational *female* subject?

The answer to these questions is, predictably, no, and yes. The elements that might identify a subject as transnational are, as my terms illustrate, diverse: they could include one or any combination of holding dual or plural passports, being resident in or moving frequently between two or more different nation-states, having heritage in two or more different nations or cultures, speaking or understanding with near-native familiarity two or more languages, and so on. Giulia in *Nuvole sull'equatore* effects one major migration from Africa to Europe, and a number of intracontinental or intranational movements in between; Anita in *Milano, fin qui tutto bene* is born, raised, and resident in Milan, and would be termed by sociologists of migration "sedentary."⁴¹ Yet the overwhelming sense communicated by the narrative of her mode of living,

³⁹ For an example of press coverage, see "Delitto in strada, egiziano ucciso. E' guerriglia urbana in via Padova," *La Repubblica*, February 13, 2010:

http://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/02/13/news/delitto_in_strada_egiziano_ucciso_e_guerriglia_urbana_in_via_padova-2613180/?refresh_ce (accessed on November 19, 2018). The title provides an example of how the event was inflated to "urban warfare."

⁴⁰ Kuruvilla, *Milano*, 12.

⁴¹ See, for example, Paolo Boccagni, *Migration and the Search for Home: Mapping Domestic Space in Migrants' Everyday Lives* (New York: Palgrave, 2017). In his compelling study, Boccagni employs this standard distinction between those whose political status is as migrants and those who reside in their nation of birth.

feeling, and thinking is that she is radically, even essentially, mobile. Giulia's most powerful local attachment in Rome seems to be to Mogadishu, whilst Anita lives her locality of Milan with almost prosthetic continuity between the body and the material world, and yet this is a Milan which is Chinese, Argentinian, Philippine, Egyptian, Rom, Neapolitan, etc. This suggests that transnational subjecthood may be simply a fact of life in globalized society, and one that may be modulated by gender and sexuality as much as by other indices of diversity, but in its complex relationality cannot be reduced to discrete categories of identity. Certainly, gender makes a difference, as illustrated by Giulia's curiosity for the rural Somali girls or by Anita's experience of motherhood, but not necessarily a determining difference.

Stephen Clingman offers a nuance that helps to pinpoint the specificity of the novels I use as examples here, and to articulate in what way they are distinct from any other contemporary Italian novel, by any other contemporary "Italian" writer. In his study of transnational fictions from the English-language canon, he stresses that "what makes fiction transnational are questions of form."⁴² Through use of metaphor and other stylistic features, he identifies border-crossing as a matter of navigation, and states that "whether it concerns language, fiction, identity, or location, navigation does not mean crossing or having crossed, but *being in the space of crossing*. It means *being prepared to be* in the space of crossing, in transition, in movement, in journey. It means accepting placement as *displacement*, position as *disposition*, not through coercion of others or by others of ourselves, but through "disposition" as an affect of the self, as a kind of approach" (*The Grammar of Identity*, 24–25). It is this "disposition" that I think emerges from the narratives of self that I have discussed, and which is more than a characteristic of certain individuals but an "affect of the self" born of the experience of living in between multiple places and cultures, of living Shohat's "hyphenated realities." More specifically, still recalling Shohat's "Remembering a Baghdad," this "disposition" finds its expression in implementing creative writing as an ongoing act of "re-membrance," inscribing the reassembly of parts produced in different locations and encounters. It is in this respect, in their location "*in the space of crossing*" between fictional, biographical and autobiographical writing, that Ramzanali Fazel and Kuruvilla perhaps posit the specificity of the transnational woman writer's "disposition" and of her particular effort to re-member in narrative form a dislocated subject whose agency and presence in space may have been, and continue to be, felt as liminal, unrecognized, or insubstantial. Their "disposition" equips them to enunciate also the possibility and the creativity to be unearthed in such spaces of apparent muteness, and in telling the stories of both being and becoming in these between-spaces, to create a powerful "figuration," in Braidotti's terms, substantiating "a transformative account of the self" (*Nomadic Theory*, 14). The power of this creative and imaginative work speaks to Braidotti's description of nomadic feminism as not being "contained in the power (potestas) structures of the dialectics masculine/feminine," but rather constituting "an active space of empowerment (potentia) and becoming" (*Nomadic Theory*, 148). This may be the precise potential of transnational writing in Italian.

⁴² Stephen Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10.